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ABSTRACT

This booklet lists 11 national standards for youth sports programs developed to promote a positive social experience as the primary goal of such programs. Each standard includes information on the background of its development, its rationale, and implementation information. Many of the standards address parent responsibilities. The standards are: (1) parents should select proper sports environment; (2) programs should be based on the well-being of children; (3) parents should encourage drug, tobacco and alcohol-free environment; (4) youth sports must be seen as only a small part of a child's life; (5) coaches must be trained and certified; (6) parents must make an effort to take an active role; (7) parents must be a positive role model exhibiting sportsmanlike behavior; (8) parents must annually sign a parental code of ethics; (9) parents must insist on safe playing facilities, healthful playing situations, and proper first aid applications; (10) parents, coaches and league administrators must provide equal sports opportunity for all youth regardless of race, creed, sex, economic status or ability; and (11) parents in any program capacity must be drug, tobacco and alcohol-free at youth sports activities. (JB)

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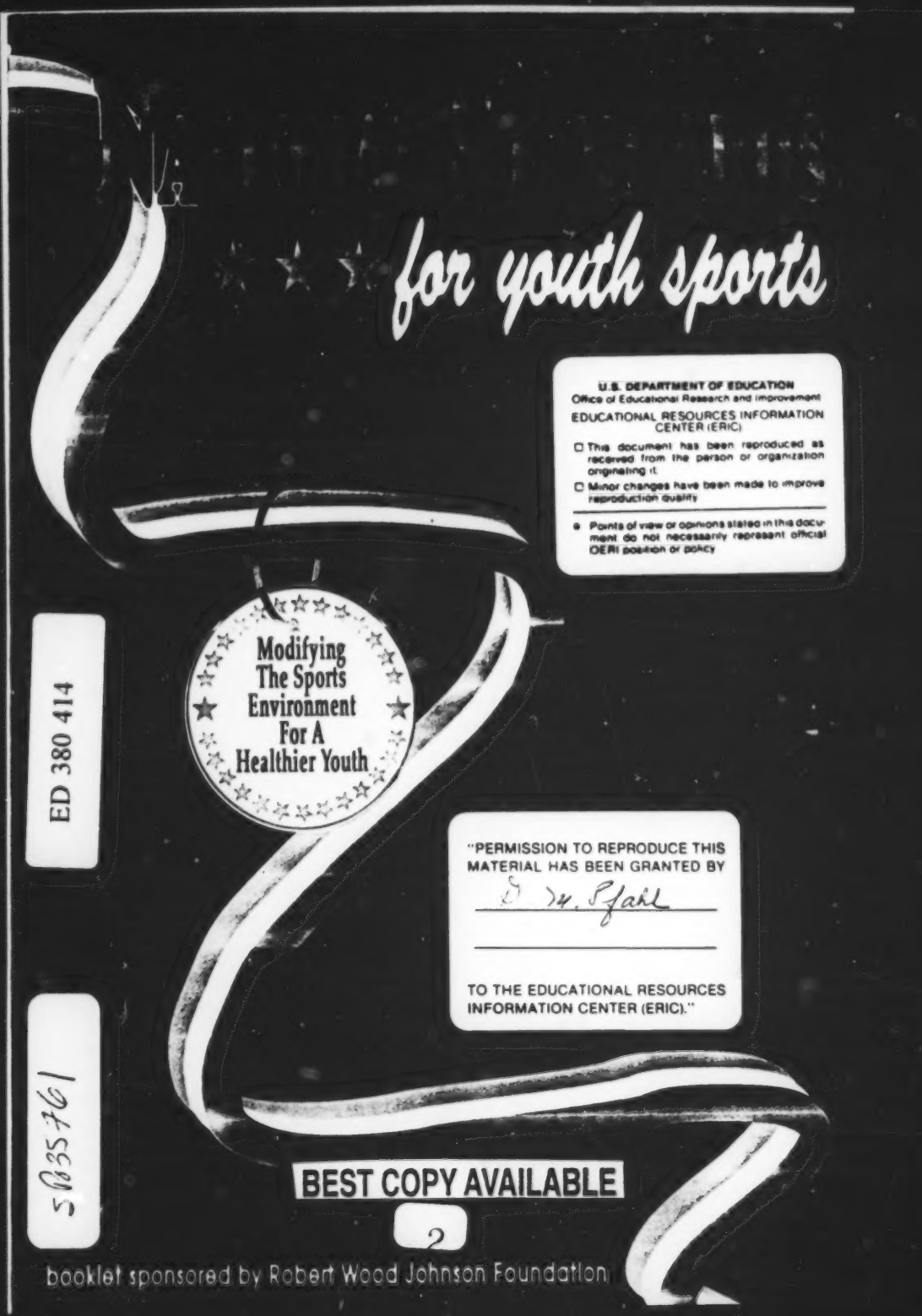
for youth sports
Modifying The Sports Environment For A Healthier Youth
booklet sponsored by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

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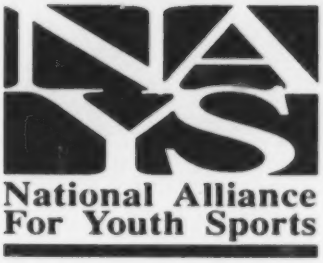

The National Alliance For Youth Sports is grateful to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for their support in helping to modify the sports environment for a healthier youth.

Why These Standards Were Developed

While sport for children is generally a positive experience, too often, history has shown that youth leagues have been created with an atmosphere of professionalism, e.g. the vicarious parent, the overzealous coach, leagues organized with championships as their main focus continue to exist. The National Standards for Youth Sports were developed to provide all youth groups with a focus on what is best for children in their growing, learning years.

How These Standards Were Developed

Forty-eight of the nation's leading experts representing a vast variety of disciplines affecting youth sports from academic institutions to grassroot organizations were assembled in Washington D.C., October 28-30, 1987. Their goal was to develop standards that all parents should follow in developing and administering youth sports for children. The faculty studied the role of the parent in youth sports from the educational, physical, emotional, and social aspect of youth sport involvement.

What These Standards Mean For You

The National Standards for Youth Sports place in motion a national policy for children's sports. With leagues initiating the implementation of these Standards, parents can feel confident that youth sports will truly be a positive social experience for their child.

For further information contact the National Alliance For Youth Sports at 1-(800) 729-2057

Honorary Chairman
Congressman
Jim Bunning

NYSCA Wishes To Pay Tribute To The Following Individuals who Lent Their Time And Expertise In The Development Of These National Standards To Help Improve Sports For Children.

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Parents must consider and carefully choose the proper environment for their child, including the appropriate age and development for participation, the type of sport, the rules in the sport, the age range of the participants, and the proper level of physical and emotional stress.

Background

There is a wide variety of youth sports experiences available to children. Some of these begin as early as five years of age and include both collision and non-collision sports, elite and recreational play categories, single age and multi-age participation ranges and unstructured to highly-organized and competitive programs.

Rationale

Because all children physically and emotionally mature at different rates, parents must evaluate very carefully their child's youth sports experience.

Implementation

1. Leagues will establish a minimum play rule per game for all children regardless of ability.
2. Leagues will organize programs within a two year age range, such as 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, 11-12, etc.
3. Leagues will allow post-season play only for regular season teams and not engage in choosing post-season All-Star teams.
4. Leagues will establish a policy of not cutting players and will provide an opportunity for meaningful play for all children.
5. If awards are given, leagues will give participation awards and reduce emphasis on competitive trophies.
6. League standings will not be used below the age of 9 and will be deemphasized below the age of 13 by using techniques such as publishing only end-of-season results.

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Parents must select youth sports programs that are developed and organized to enhance the emotional, physical, social and educational well-being of children.

Background

Many organized play experiences for children are carbon copies of adult-oriented programs. The rules, skill expectations and competitive requirements are the same as in high school, college, and professional levels.

Rationale

Youth sports programs should be based on maximum participation. The program should focus on organizing meaningful play. Coaches should let children be involved in making decisions. The level and length of athletic competition should be commensurate with the physical and emotional development of the child.

Implementation

1. Leagues will organize programs using the following guidelines:

A. 5 to 6 Year Old's ~ Developmental Program

- no regular competitive teams
- scores or standings not kept
- rules, equipment, and field modified
- limit uniforms to t-shirt and hat
- no scheduled leagues, tournament or all-star competition
- leagues and coaches not permitted to require sport specialization
- co-rec play
- no travel
- coaches permitted on playing surface

B. 7 to 8 Year Old's ~ Sport Introduction Program

- informal teams
- scores or standings not kept
- rules, equipment, and fields modified

7

STANDARD #2 CONTINUED

- limited uniforms
- no tournament, post-season play or all-star competition
- co-rec play encouraged
- travel within local community only
- coaches permitted on playing surface
- leagues and coaches not permitted to require sports specialization

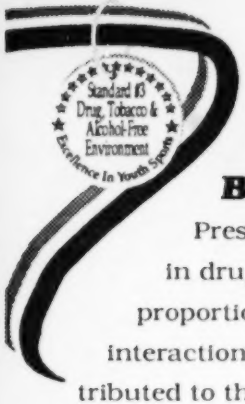
C. 9 to 10 Year Old's ~ Organizational Program

- scores kept but standings de-emphasized
- rules, equipment, and fields modified where necessary
- no out-of-community post-season play
- no national tournament participation
- leagues and coaches not permitted to require sports specialization

D. 11 to 12 Year Old's ~ Skill Enhancement Program

- reasonable uniform policy
- limited ability grouping used with proper grouping procedures
- encourage a variety of position and situational plays

2. Coaches will be required not to teach the use of sports to punish opponents through physical contact or excessive score domination.
3. Year round participation must not be required by league or coaches.
4. Leagues must adopt rules banning rapid weight loss / gain procedures used solely for participation in youth sports.
5. Children below the age of 11 years should participate in activities that contain limited collision potential and feature modified rules that will significantly reduce the chance of injury.
6. Leagues must consider weight and skill in grouping children.
7. Coaches must apply proper principles of conditioning and nutrition.



Parents must encourage a drug, tobacco and alcohol-free environment for their children.

Background

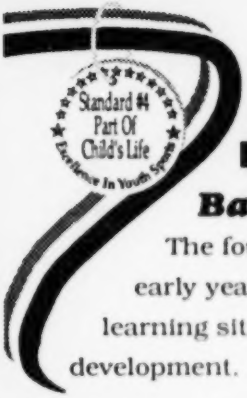
Pressures and opportunities for children to be involved in drug, tobacco and alcohol abuse have increased to crisis proportions during the past decades. Unsupervised social interaction and unknowledgeable adult leadership have contributed to the problem.

Rationale

Coaches and parents must be educated about all drugs, including performance enhancement chemicals. Leagues should have policies dealing with drug, tobacco and steroid use and emphasizing prevention through education. Parents, league administrators, and coaches should be taught what to look for in abuse of these drugs and know how to access community resources for assistance on drug-related problems.

Implementation

1. Leagues will adopt rules prohibiting the use of alcohol, illegal substances or tobacco by coaches, league administrators or game officials at all youth sports events.
2. Leagues will provide coaches and parents educational information on identifying signs and symptoms for substance use by children. (Note: The **National Clearinghouse For Youth Sports Information** can be contacted for education materials. Write: NCYSI, 2611 Old Okeechobee Road, West Palm Beach, FL, 33409)
3. Leagues will establish policy and implementation procedures for immediately dealing with substance use by coaches and players and communicate these policies to coaches, players, and parents.
4. Leagues will continually encourage dialogue between coaches, players and parents about the need for an alcohol, tobacco and drug-free environment for children.



Parents must recognize that youth sports are only a small part of a child's life.

Background

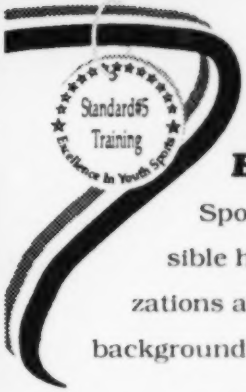
The foundation for human development occurs during the early years of life. Individuals are exposed to many different learning situations to increase their potential for successful development.

Rationale

Parents, coaches and league administrators need to encourage children to be involved in a variety of activities while recognizing that the home, church, school and a variety of other social experiences are all a part of a child's growth and development. Parents must respect a child's decision not to play. Coaches and parents must realize that youth sports involvement also has ramifications for the entire family. Parents should insist that youth sports participation not detract from the child's academic progress.

Implementation

1. Leagues will adopt a policy that allows for and encourages participation in a variety of youth activities in addition to the child's particular sport.
2. Leagues and coaches will not demand year-round involvement in a particular sport as a condition for meaningful participation.
3. Leagues will establish rules that limit organized practices to no more than 1 hour a day and three days a week through the age of 12 and not more than 1 1/2 hours and four days a week through the age of 16.
4. Leagues will adopt a policy that make provisions for excused absences through parental requests for church, school, and other family activities.



Parents must insist that coaches be trained and certified.

Background

Sports participation can lead to harm if those responsible have no training. In most cases, youth sports organizations allow volunteers to coach without performing any background check.

Rationale

Parents should insist that coaches are educated in the following areas: psychological and emotional needs of children, safety and first aid, conditioning and nutrition, teaching proper sports techniques and drug awareness.

Implementation

1. Leagues will require that coaches be annually trained and certified in the areas of the emotional needs of children, safety and first aid, conditioning and nutrition, teaching proper sport techniques and drug and tobacco education.
2. League administrators and officials must also be trained in the aforementioned areas.
3. Leagues must use appropriate and available screening techniques for selecting and assigning coaches to ensure that children are protected from abuse.
4. Leagues are encouraged to provide additional educational resources for coaches to assist them in providing the best possible youth sports experience for each child.
5. All coaches must sign a code of ethics pledging their commitment to provide an enjoyable, healthful youth sports experience.

Parents must make a serious effort to take an active role in the youth sports experience of their child providing positive support as a spectator, coach, league administrator and/or caring parent.

Background

Many parents pass their youngsters over to others, relying on someone else to take responsibility for their child's youth sports experience.

Rationale

Parents are the key. They need to demonstrate the positive benefits of a youth sports experience by attending games, practices, or team social events; or by taking the time to volunteer as a coach or league official; or by just expressing their positive support. Parents should discuss with their child why the child is participating and help him /her in evaluating his/her experience.

Implementation

1. Parents will be required to attend a league orientation meeting. This may be one-on-one with a league official, if necessary.
2. Teams will be required to have a minimum of one team/parents' meeting each sports season.
3. Leagues will advertise parental involvement in roles such as coach, team manager, fund-raiser, league manager, special assistant, and fan.
4. Leagues will encourage parent-child communication about their youth sports experience through newsletters, team meetings, coach-parent and coach-player discussions, and league handbooks or guidelines.

Parents must be a positive role model exhibiting sportsmanlike behavior at games, practices, and home while giving positive reinforcement to their child and support to their child's coaches.

Background

Children will follow the example of the adult role model and in particular, the parent. Children will copy or imitate their parents' sports behavior, including the development of values based on that behavior.

Rationale

If the youth sports experience is to be a positive one for each child, parents must demonstrate sportsmanlike behavior as a fan, coach, and league administrator. They need to encourage fun, give lots of praise for the little successes along the way and, when a child makes a mistake, separate the mistake from the child. Parents need to encourage peer support and give positive verbal support to team members, opponents and coaches of their child.

Implementation

1. Leagues will develop a sportsmanship/conduct code including unacceptable behavior, e.g.
- berating players, coaches, officials
- use of vulgar language
- intoxication

2. Leagues will communicate conduct requirements to coaches, parents, players and spectators through newsletters, handbooks, postings, and announcements.

3. Leagues will develop an enforcement plan for implementing a sportsmanship code, including removal procedures.

Parents must demonstrate their commitment to their child's youth sports experience by annually signing a parental code of ethics.

Background

Individuals that sign commitments are usually more positive and supportive of their children.

Rationale

The parents should be knowledgeable of the opportunities and responsibilities for having their child involved in youth sports. They should also be requested to demonstrate their commitment by signing a code which outlines the opportunities their child should have through participation, as well as the responsibility the parent has in supporting the youth sports experience.

Implementation

Participation will not be allowed for parents or guardians who refuse to sign the parental code of ethics.

Parents must insist on safe playing facilities, healthful playing situations and proper first aid applications, should the need arise.

Background

Children participating in youth sports are exposed to a variety of facilities, training programs and organized risk taking opportunities. Most adult leaders do not have coaching degrees or university coaching certification.

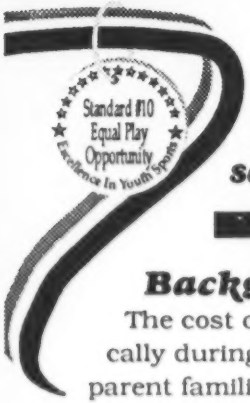
STANDARD #9 CONTINUED

Rationale

Coaches and league administrators have the responsibility to inspect and insure proper maintenance of facilities; have knowledge of proper equipment fitting, selection and appropriate use; understand the physical consequence of improper skill techniques; have the ability to modify rules for safe-playing situations; understand the physical need for a proper child-oriented conditioning program; understand proper weight control practices and have knowledge of prevention and first aid for athletic injuries including the ability to implement emergency procedures.

Implementation

1. Leagues will develop procedures for inspecting playing facilities for safety hazards before every youth sports activity.
2. Leagues will select equipment designed to ensure injury reduction for participants, (e.g. baseballs designed to reduce injuries, soccer shin guards, approved protective equipment in contact sports).
3. Leagues will be required to develop procedures for continual safety inspections of all playing equipment.
4. Leagues will ensure that teams have a fully equipped first aid kit at all youth sports activities.
5. Leagues will develop a plan for coaches on how to handle all emergencies at youth sports activities.
6. Leagues will establish procedures to ensure that all teams and events have an emergency first aid plan and equipment for dealing with injuries, hazards and weather conditions.
7. Leagues will not allow participation during unsafe conditions, such as lightening storms, darkness, playing sites in disrepair, etc.
8. Leagues will remove coaches that knowingly require or allow a player to play while having a serious injury or knowingly create unsafe play situations.
9. Leagues should require coaches to take CPR and advanced first aid training.



Parents, coaches, and league administrators must provide equal sports play opportunity for all youth regardless of race, creed, sex, economic status or ability.

Background

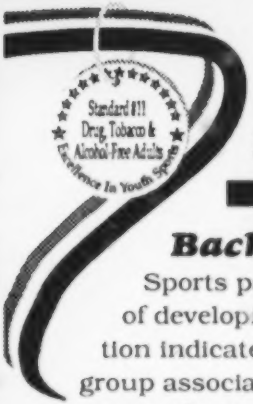
The cost of participation in youth sports has risen dramatically during the past several years as have the number of single parent families. Although sports opportunities for girls and racial minorities have improved, many adults still fail to recognize the contribution of the youth sports experience for all children.

Rationale

All children must have the opportunity to play regardless of race, creed, sex, economic status or ability. The coaches and league officials should recognize sex/role stereotyping and demand that racial prejudice of any type be prohibited. Every effort should be made to provide financial assistance to those youngsters unable to afford participation, including the cost of safe equipment. Adult youth sports leaders must teach a tolerance of, and respect for, people of all abilities, sizes, shapes, colors, cultural and economic backgrounds. Youth sports should be a growth, rather than a limiting, experience.

Implementation

1. Leagues must adopt a non-discrimination policy that ensures participation for all youngsters regardless of race, creed, sex, economic status or ability.
2. Leagues will make provisions so that all youngsters may be able to participate regardless of their financial ability to pay.
3. Leagues are encouraged to provide co-recreational programs through age 12.
4. Leagues will adopt an affirmative action coaching recruitment policy that will provide for the recruitment and selection of qualified women and minorities.



Parents as coaches, fans, and league administrators must be drug, tobacco and alcohol-free at youth sports activities.

Background

Sports participation has long been characterized as a means of developing character and positive values. Recent information indicates that competitive pressures, negative sports peer group associations and unhealthy adult role models may actually increase the risk of drug, tobacco and alcohol use among youth participants.

Rationale

Because of the influence they exert, parents involved in youth sports should understand that they must refrain from substance use, including smoking, alcohol consumption, chewing tobacco and illegal drugs at games, practices and other youth sports events. Healthful role modeling should lead the way in influencing youngsters to avoid drug, tobacco and alcohol use.

Implementation

1. Leagues will require coaches, league administrators and game officials to refrain from the use of alcohol, illegal substances and tobacco at youth sports events.
2. Leagues will require that alcohol will not be sold or allowed to be brought into youth sports games and practices.
3. Leagues will encourage spectators not to use tobacco at youth sports events.
4. Leagues will develop an enforcement plan for removing coaches, parents and spectators who are under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances.

Over 200
Agencies & Organizations
have by resolution
endorsed the
National Standards
For Youth Sports.

A complete list can
be obtained by
contacting the

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